



News Release

For Immediate Release
May 16, 2016

NISD's Sandy Conklin Named H-E-B Excellence in Education Elementary Principal Winner, Campus to Receive \$25,000 Grant

"Life is about a collection of moments," said Samuel Beck Elementary School Principal Sandy Conklin as he addressed a crowd of more than 800 people after being announced the winner of the H-E-B Excellence in Education Elementary Principal Award at the gala on May 13. This is one of those moments Principal Conklin will always remember in his 18 years as an educator.

In February, Conklin learned of his finalist status during a surprise school wide assembly with representatives from H-E-B, but the process began last fall. After learning he was nominated by a community member, Conklin completed an application in which a team of judges reviewed his professional experiences, educational philosophy and achievements both inside and outside of the classroom. H-E-B received more than 1,400 completed applications from teachers, principals, districts, school boards and early childhood facilities across the state. Those applications were reviewed by teams of judges from the Colleges of Education at Trinity University. They narrowed the field to 255 semi-finalists. Of those 255, 25 semi-finalists were elementary principals along with Principal Conklin.

Five regional judging panels consisting of former winners, administrators, university and community leaders selected the 40 individual statewide finalists, five of those being elementary principals. As one of five finalists in the state, Conklin received a \$1,000 personal check plus a \$2,500 grant for Beck Elementary School.

All of the finalists were invited to San Antonio May 12-13 for the awards celebration. Prior to the celebration, Conklin participated in the final personal interview with the statewide judging panel. At the gala on May 13, Conklin learned he was one of 12 winners across the state. As the elementary principal winner, Conklin is the recipient of \$10,000 for himself and \$25,000 for his campus.

"Community involvement is critical to the success of all students," Conklin said. He plans to gather input from parents, students and staff to decide how best to allocate the funds from the grants received for their campus. "I'm a teacher at heart. Nothing gives me more pleasure than to go in the classroom and see the face of a child learning something new. I am truly honored to receive this award. Thank you to H-E-B, to the judges that felt I was worthy of the award and to the outstanding staff I work with each day. I would not be where I am today without them."

Conklin was named principal at Northwest ISD's Beck Elementary School in 2013 after serving for five years at NISD's Prairie View Elementary School. Under his leadership, he has focused on culture, staff morale, community engagement and parent involvement. Conklin and his team have developed the "True Blue Bulldog" code of ethics to teach lessons on character and techniques that can make students better learners. In 2015, his campus was awarded the Texas School Counselor Association CREST (Counselors Reinforcing Excellence in Texas) Award and a Character.org Promising Practice Award.

He is grateful for the parent and community partnerships at his campus. In just two years under his leadership, parent volunteerism increased by more than 1,200 hours per year, students completed more than 27 service learning projects and two teachers were named districtwide Elementary Teachers of the Year.

"My number one job is to support teachers, who in turn support students so that they are successful," Conklin said. "Building relationships with faculty is very important to me. Culture always trumps strategy."

As Conklin prepared for a trip to San Antonio to complete his finalist interview, he learned on Mother's Day his mother was hospitalized after battling lung cancer for several months. He contemplated not going to San Antonio, but his mother insisted he attend. Thursday evening, after his finalist interview that morning, Conklin learned his mother lost her fight to

cancer and had passed away. As Conklin addressed the gala attendees during the celebration after being announced the winner he said, "I cherished the moments I had with my mother. In education, we have to cherish moments with our students. We never know the kind of impact we have on someone."

Conklin plans to make a donation with some of the funds he personally received from H-E-B to the Lung Cancer Foundation of America.

In its 15th year, H-E-B launched the Excellence in Education awards program in cooperation with the Texas Association of School Administrators as a positive way to support public education in Texas. To date, the organization has given more than \$8 million to educators, schools, districts and early childhood facilities across the state. This is the largest monetary awards program for educators in Texas and one of the largest in the nation. This is the first time an NISD educator has received an H-E-B Excellence in Education award.

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